

The
QUESTION

Why, The Dissenting Party can not join with the present Church Government, as established by Law for Conscience sake, and example of the Primitive Church. but willing to live in Peace and Unity with them.

IT may be matter of sad regrave that ever any should have imployed their parts and abilities in writing so much upon the Debates that have fallen out for our correction, as it is at this day : It being a Judgment upon us to have suffered Shipwrack upon such a Rock, and to spend our time about such work, when it might be far better imployed, and our Condition calls for another exercise; Yet when we look upon Affairs, as they stand, by reason of our contentions, it needs not be thought strange if necessity put men to say somewhat, for vindication of the Truth, and clearing of Mistakes. When we consider our case in this time, and how by our Differences the generality of the People are turned loose unto Atheism, and uncertainty in Religion, how godly hearts are puzzled and misled through their mistake of matters, how Church Government is made ineffectual to restrain the huge Delusion from the Truth that appears in this time.

BUT the question touching us is not concerning Bishops governing absolutely by themselves and their delegates, but concerning Bishops governing in conjunction with Presbyters in Presbyteries and Synods of which we affirm.

That it is neither contrary to the Scriptures, nor the example of the Primitive Church, but well agreeable to both; If any think otherways let them produce their Evidences of Scripture and Antiquities. If they say, it is not unlawful to such a Form lawful, that it is not contrary to Scripture. But they ought to be an express command or rule in Scripture to warrant it, they will soon be so just, as to subject to the same Law themselves. Let them then produce such an express command or rule for their own Model of Kirk sessions, Presbyteries, Synods Provincial and National, and a Commission of the Kirk in their several Dependence and Subordinations for the ordinarie and constant government and Exercise of Discipline in the Church, and the necessary changing of the Ministers in those Meetings, excepting onlie that of the Kirk session, wherein the Minister is constantlie so moderate. For without such an express rule to this, a Bishop or such President may vote and carry it with what will please him, and he will contend for; And it is really and truly the case of this present Church, and they stand so much the rather obliged to bring a clear command for these Institutions, and their Subordinations, because they affirm them to be unquestionable divine Right, and the verie Kingdom of Christ upon Earth and the onlie lawful and absolutely necessarie Government of the Christian Church. whereas the Asserters of other Forms do not usually speak so big. If they shall say, they are not against a fixed President or Bishop, or call him what you will (for to contend about names, especially



allie in so grave a Matter, is trivial and childish) but that the question is about their power, then we beg that it may be so. Let that be all the question betwixt us, and then we hope the controversie will be quicklie ended; for we trust we shal be found not at all desirous to usurpe or effect any undue power, but rather to abate of that power which is reasonable and conform even to primitive Episcopacie, than that a Schisme should continue in our Church upon that Score. But be it supposed, That Bishops do stretch their power somewhat beyond their Line, let all the World judge, whether Ministers are for that engaged to leave their Station and withdraw from those Meetings, of the Church which themselves approve of, for the exercise of Discipline, yea and (as many of them have done) to separate from the publick Worship, and whole Communion of the Church, because of some degree of wrong done them (as they think) in that point of power, or whether they had not sufficiently acquitted themselves, & discharged their Consciences by free declaring of their Opinion concerning that Matter, and modestly desiring the Redress of it; and patiently waiting for it, though it be not presently redress'd, and continuing in the performance of their own Duty to their power, though others above them, or about them, do transgress theirs, or seem at least to them to do so, otherwise, if we think our selves obliged for every thing that is, or that we judge faulty in other persons, or in the Frame of things, or relinquish either the Communion of it, or our Station in it, what will there be but endless swarms of Separations and Divisions in any Church under the Sun.

For there is not a greater enemy in the World to the power of Religion, than the wranglings and bitter contentions that are caused about the external forms of it. As *Nazianzen* pathetically begins one of his orations for peace, I confess I have sometime wondered to see some wise and good men, after all that can be said to them, make so great reckoning of certain Metaphysical exceptions against some little words and formalities of difference in the Government, and set so little a value upon so great a thing, as is the peace of the Church. Oh when shall the loud and harsh noises of our debates, be turned to the sweeter sound of united Prayers for this blessed Peace, that we might cry with one Heart and Voice to the God of Peace, who alone can give it, *Pacem te poscimus omnes*: And if we be real supplicants for it, we would bewaile of being the disappointers of our own desires, & of obstructing the Blessing we Pray for, and therefore would mainly study a temper receptive of it, and that is great Meekness and Charitie, and certainly whatsoever Party or Opinion we follow in this matter, the badge by which we must be known to be followers of Jesus Christ is this, *That we Love one another, and that Law unquestionably is of divine Right, and therefore would not be broken by bitter Passions and Revilings, and rooted hatreds one against another, for things about which the Right is in dispute betwixt us; and however that be, are we Christians?* Then doubtles the things wherein we agree, are incomparably greater than these wherein we disagree, and therefore in all reason should be more powerful to unite us, than the other to divide us. But to restrain my self, and stop here; if we love both our own and the Churches Peace; There be two things I conceive, we should most carefully avoid, the bestowing of too great Zeal upon small things, and too much confidence of Opinion upon doubtless things: It is a mad thing to rush on hard and boldly in the dark, and we all know what kind of Person it is of whom *Solomon* says, *That he rages and is confident.*